

Below is a transcript of KUHF Radio's news coverage of the Commuter Choice Workshop. The station has also added links to its site for more information.

BROADCAST TRANSCRIPT

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Debra Fraser, anchor:

Traffic congestion and air pollution are two problems that are tied together. Most clean air regulations put the burden on local communities to come up with solutions but the Environmental Protection Agency is trying to give a helping hand. Capella Tucker reports representatives are in Houston recruiting companies for the National Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative.

Capella Tucker reporting:

The EPA and the U.S. Department of Transportation are trying to encourage employers to offer commuter benefits to employees. The goal is to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, to improve traffic safety and energy security, and also to increase employee job satisfaction.

Officials pose a question to business: Are employees more valuable on the job or on the road? EPA Commuter Choice manager Stephan Sylvan told a local workshop that employees' daily commutes are like second jobs.

Stephan Sylvan (EPA Commuter Choice Manager): Now this is an unusual second job. Most second jobs pay. In this second job, you pay the second—you pay to work at the second job, the order of three thou—three thousand dollars per year in expenses to work at the second job.

Tucker: Transit passes are one example of a commuter benefit a company may offer to employees. Holding one card, Sylvan explains companies can purchase them tax-free and the value is not subject to income taxes for the employee.

Sylvan: Then you consider the fact that this little card will then help that employee save maybe another fifty dollars per month in gasoline, vehicle

wear and tear, and so forth. So what you've done is taken an employer contribution of maybe thirty or forty dollars per month and multiplied it into a hundred and twenty to a hundred and fifty dollar per month value. There are few employee benefits that have that kind of multiplier effect.

Tucker: Some other commuter benefits include telecommuting, shuttles to and from transit stations, car pooling and compressed work schedules. The Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative is a voluntary program and to meet this national standard of excellence, companies have to agree to offer at least four commuter benefits and have fourteen percent of their workforce participate.

Alan Clark manages transportation and air quality programs for the Houston-Galveston Area Council.

Alan Clark (Houston-Galveston Area Council): Some of the strategies that we're discussing are not—most of them are not brand new. But what kind of is new is an employer being able to provide those in a comprehensive way to their employees and being actively involved in that process. That does take time. It takes—it takes some financial commitment on the part of employers but we think that many will find that the return to their bottom line is a lot greater than the cost of helping to provide those programs.

Tucker: Nationwide, several companies and cities, including Fort Worth, Texas have been taking part in a pilot program. Officials plan to unveil the Commuter Choice program nationally this summer.

Visit kuhf.org to learn more about the national effort and also find links to those organizing the effort in Houston. Capella Tucker, KUHf News.

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